



Meet *Delia Ray*

Delia Ray knows firsthand the hardships of the Yukon. To research her book *Gold! The Klondike Adventure*, she traveled to White Horse, a small city in the heart of gold-rush country. There, she had planned to study historical photographs and papers in the local museum. But the museum was closed! Next,

she got snowed in. "It helped me get a picture of what it must have been like for the early goldseekers," she says. Eventually, though, she spent a week in the government archives, poring over letters, Mounted Police records, and other documents dating back to 1897.

At the University of Washington in Seattle, Ray discovered a treasure-trove of photographs and accounts by people who had joined in the Klondike gold rush. "I began to think anybody who ever came back to Seattle wrote a book about the Klondike experience," she jokes.

"I loved looking at the old Klondike photos," recalls Ray. "Some were taken in people's cabins, . . . usually by photographers who knew the people involved. The book really began with the photos."

KLONDIKE

fever

by Delia Ray





George Washington Carmack



Skookum Jim



Tagish Charley

The city of Seattle was usually still asleep at daybreak on weekend mornings, but this Saturday large crowds of people rushed to the downtown waterfront at dawn. They shouted excitedly to one another, pointed across the water, and craned their necks to see. The *Portland* was coming! With its smokestack puffing and whistle blowing, the steamship chugged its way toward shore. On board was the most precious cargo ever to enter the Seattle harbor—sixty-eight miners from the Klondike and more than two tons of gold.

It was two days earlier when the first of the gold ships had arrived in San Francisco, California. The steamer *Excelsior* had sailed into port, bringing its load of gold and the news that an even richer treasure ship was on its way to Seattle. Finally, the *Portland* appeared in Seattle on July 17, 1897—almost one year after George Washington Carmack and his close friends Tagish Charley and Skookum Jim made their discovery on Bonanza Creek.

To the impatient spectators on the dock, the *Portland* seemed to move in slow motion. "Show us the gold!" yelled the onlookers, and several miners on board lifted their heavy sacks for all to see. A thrill swept through the crowd, as each person imagined the glittering gold dust and nuggets inside the bags.

The big ship carefully pulled alongside the wharf and the gangplank was lowered.

When the first miner stepped into full view, the people stared in amazement. He heaved a buckskin bag to his shoulder and steadied the load. His face was lean and weather-beaten, lined with the strain of hard work and long Yukon

winters. Behind him two men staggered down the ramp, each grasping the end of a sagging blanket. One after another they came, carrying old leather suitcases, pine boxes, and pickle jars—anything that would hold the heavy piles of gold. The commotion on the docks grew with each miner that appeared. "Hurray for the Klondike!" the people cried.

As the ragged and bearded men set foot on shore, they squinted into the crowd, searching for familiar faces. Instead of old friends and relatives,

The passengers of the Portland arrived in Seattle with over two tons of gold and fantastic stories of the rich Klondike. Several of the miners in this photograph rest their sacks of gold on their shoulders.





the trip, only he and two other men reached their final destination.

As the newspapers reported, Berry was not discouraged when he did not strike gold during his first year in the Klondike. He returned to California only long enough to marry his sweetheart, Ethyl Bush. Then back to the Yukon he went, with his new wife wrapped in a fur robe and bearskin hood.

Berry was working as a bartender in the saloon at the town of Forty Mile when George Carmack entered with his shotgun shell full of gold dust. Berry threw down his apron and joined the stampede to the Klondike goldfields. Before long he had hired twenty-five workmen to help harvest the riches from his claim on Eldorado Creek. The gold lay thick, so thick that Mrs. Berry—as *The Seattle Times* reported—could walk through the diggings and pick up nuggets “as easily as a hen picks up grains of corn in a barnyard.” In one season she gathered more than \$10,000 in nuggets during her occasional strolls through the claim.

Clarence Berry plays a lute with some friends in the Klondike, while a dog holds his hat.

After the solitude of a rustic cabin in the North, the Berrys were not prepared for the swarms of reporters and followers that trailed them into restaurants and surrounded them on the street. The couple fled to San Francisco, but the crowds were just as curious there. The callers lined up outside the Berrys' room at the Grand Hotel, until finally Mr. Berry allowed them to enter. Inside Room 111 was a glittering exhibition of gold. The visitors marveled over nuggets as big as chicken eggs and glass bottles full of gold dust, each labeled with the worth it contained.

In Seattle the excitement had reached a state of frenzy. The streets were packed with people

A group of businessmen proudly display one and one-half tons of gold at the Alaska Commercial Company office in the Klondike. At today's prices, this amount would be worth well over ten million dollars.



who rushed downtown to celebrate the news from the North. Large groups gathered at banks and shop windows, where stacks of gold bricks and piles of shining nuggets were on display. One could not walk down the street without hearing the word *Klondike* spoken in a dozen different conversations.

The reason for this wild excitement was simple: The Klondike gold ships arrived during a time of terrible poverty for the United States. Thousands of businesses were closing, and millions of people had lost their jobs. It was not unusual to see a man die of hunger in the streets or a family pushed out of its home because of unpaid bills. This period of hardship, known as an economic depression, had lasted for several years and it seemed that it would never end.

The arrival of the *Portland* and the *Excelsior* was like a dream come true for the poverty-stricken nation. Penniless men read with delight each new tale of wealth in the daily papers. They read about William Stanley, who left Seattle as a poor bookshop owner and returned a millionaire. Now Stanley's wife could quit her job as a laundry-woman and order a whole new wardrobe of fancy clothes. They read about Tom Lippy, a former athletic instructor. He and his wife brought back \$60,000 in gold—a fortune in 1897, when a full meal could be purchased for 25 cents. Everywhere, people were certain they could make a trip to the Yukon and strike it rich, just as William Stanley and Tom Lippy had.

The Klondike gold rush was on. "THE POPULATION IS PREPARING TO MOVE TO THE KLONDIKE" shouted the newspaper headlines.

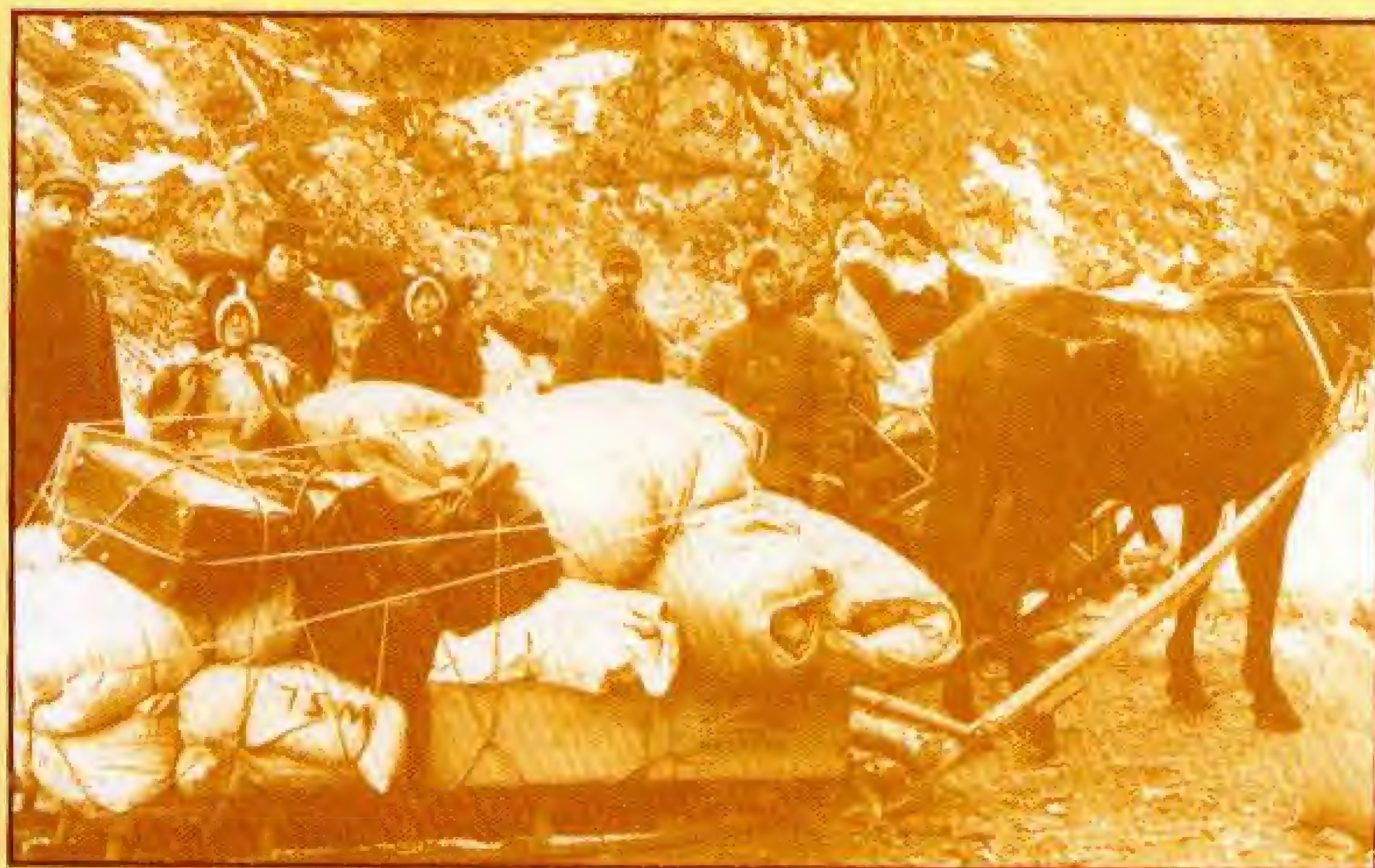
Eager to reach Dawson, the Klondike "City of Gold," many goldseekers hastily built sailboats such as the Yukon Flyer.



"EVERY MAN SEEMS TO HAVE CAUGHT THE KLONDIKE FEVER." Within hours after the gold ships had sailed into harbor, many men and women were quitting their jobs and preparing to head north. Seattle streetcar workers abandoned their trolleys on the track. Nuns left their churches, and a quarter of the police force resigned. Even the mayor announced his resignation and promptly bought a steamboat for carrying passengers to the Klondike.

Firemen, store clerks, school teachers, lawyers, and doctors—workers from Seattle to San Francisco decided to trade their regular paychecks for picks and shovels. But the West Coast of the United States was not the only region to be turned upside down by the Yukon discoveries. "Klondike fever" had spread to cities and towns throughout the country—and throughout the world. In New York, 2,000 people tried to buy tickets for the Klondike before the news of the gold strikes was one day old. Soon, groups of fortune hunters from Australia, Scotland, England, France, Italy, and other countries were also making their way toward the Yukon.

Many people could not afford to buy the steamship ticket or the supplies needed to travel northward. However, there were other ways for a poor, but determined, man to join the gold rush. Often a more wealthy acquaintance, who could not make the trip himself, was willing to provide a "grubstake"—the money needed to buy provisions for the journey. In return, the Klondiker had to promise that he would pay his debt with a share of whatever gold he found.



The hardware stores and grocery counters were booming with business. In Seattle, San Francisco, and other West Coast port cities, gold-seekers jammed store aisles. Never had shopping lists been so carefully prepared. Each Klondiker wanted to face the Arctic winds and long journey ahead with the warmest clothes and most nourishing food that money could buy.

By the winter of 1897, Canadian government officials had passed a law forbidding anyone from entering the goldfields without enough supplies to last an entire year. Once a prospector had spent \$500 to buy a year's worth of goods for the Klondike, his load weighed about 2,000 pounds. Many newspapers and guidebooks printed checklists of the exact items needed for a proper outfit, as the miners called their store of provisions.

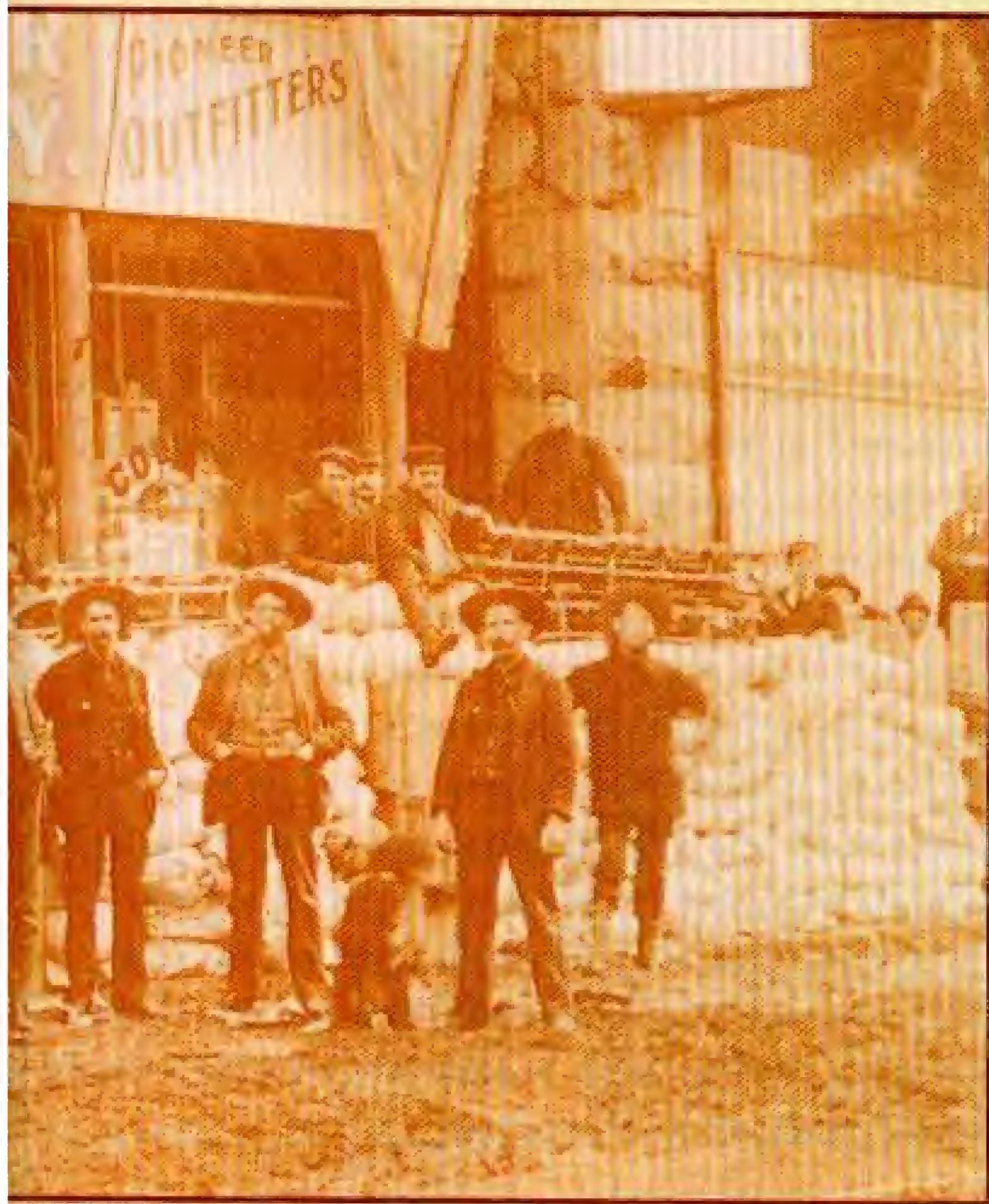
Not only hardened miners and strong men followed the dangerous Klondike trails. As this photograph shows, entire families—even grandmothers and small children—joined the rush over White Pass.

These were just some of the supplies that the future prospectors took along:

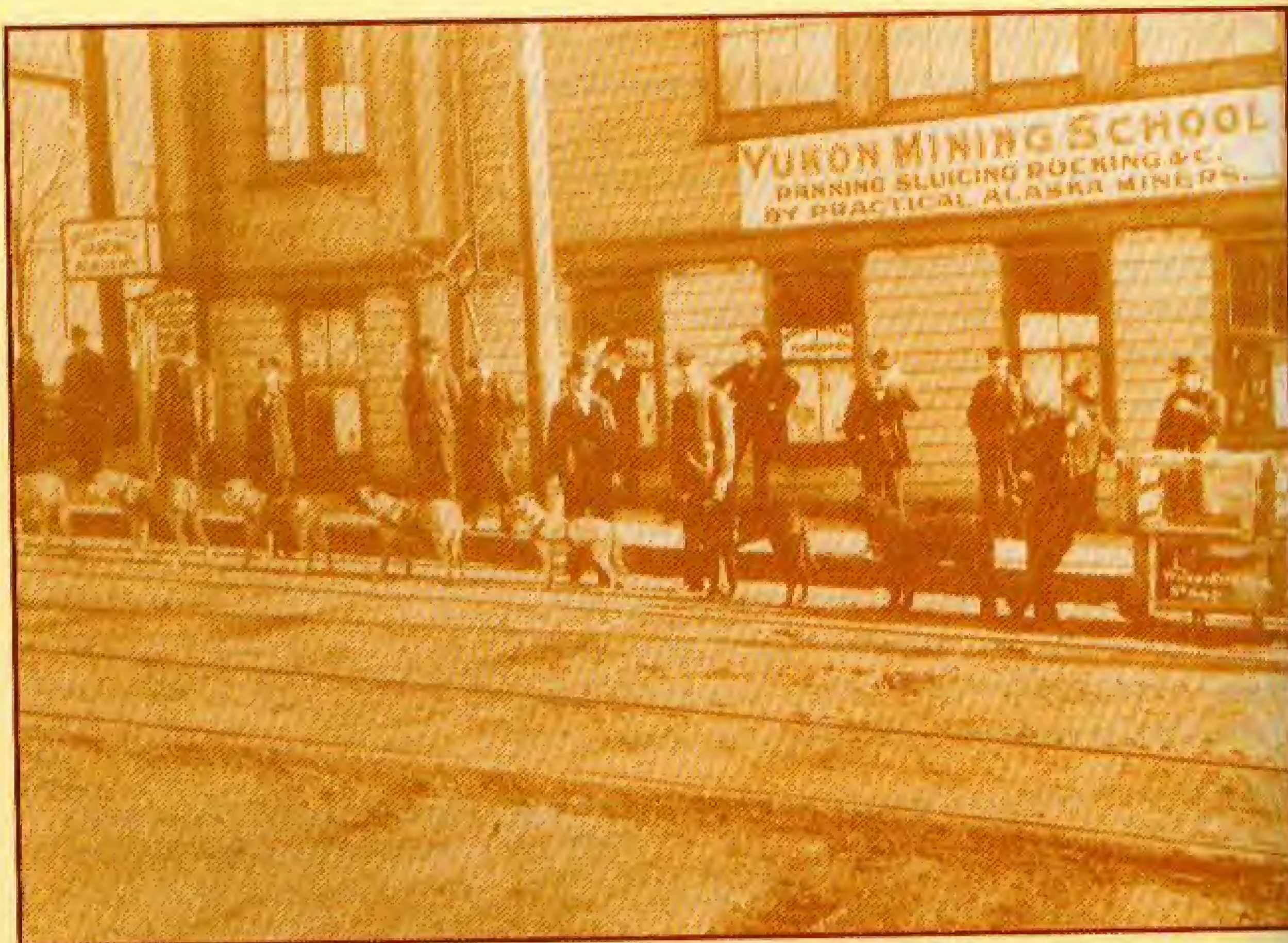
flour (150 pounds)	1 frying pan
bacon (150 pounds)	1 coffee pot
beans (100 pounds)	11 bars of soap
dried apples (25 pounds)	1 tin of matches
dried peaches (25 pounds)	1 box of candles
dried apricots (25 pounds)	1 medicine chest
rice (25 pounds)	1 pick
butter (25 pounds)	1 shovel
granulated sugar (100 pounds)	1 ax
coffee (15 pounds)	1 gold pan
tea (10 pounds)	1 handsaw
salt (10 pounds)	1 hatchet
pepper (1 pound)	6 towels
vinegar (1 gallon)	1 sheet-iron stove
1 tent	nails (16 pounds)



As the Klondikers waited for their hour of departure, they proudly sauntered up and down the streets in their new iron-toed boots and plaid flannel shirts. By now they were used to the scenes of confusion around them. The sidewalks were piled ten feet high with sacks of flour and crates of mining equipment ready to be sold to the next wave of stampederers. Long lines of people formed outside steamship offices, where the tickets were quickly sold out and clerks turned away hundreds of disappointed goldseekers. Dogs of every breed—huskies, Labradors, Saint Bernards, and golden retrievers—ran barking through the streets with their owners chasing after them. Dogs had suddenly become very valuable possessions, for many



In Seattle many merchants made fortunes selling equipment to goldseekers. Here, a group of future miners, ready to set out for the Klondike, stand in front of a wall of flour sacks and mining supplies.

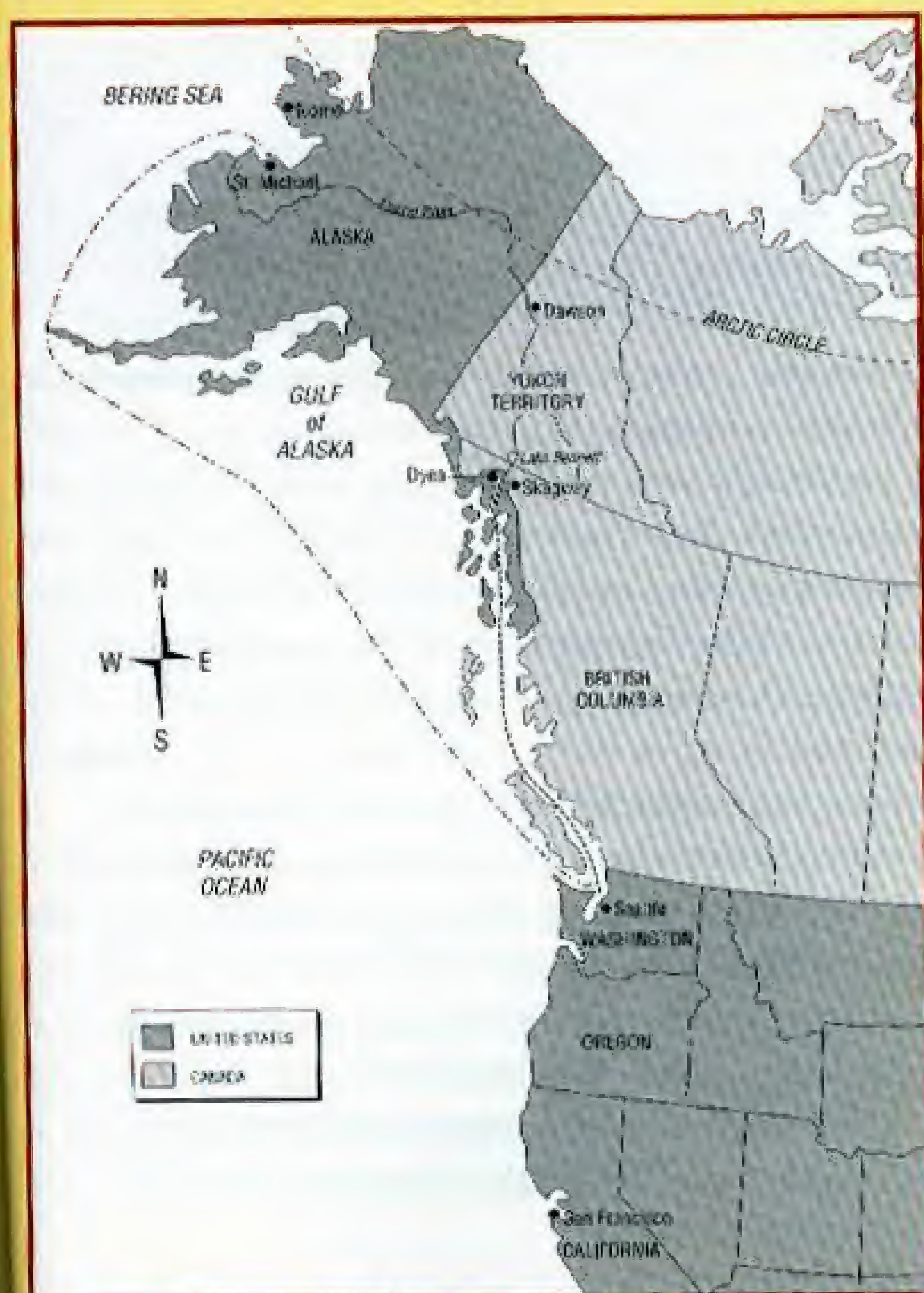


Many businesses profited from the world's fascination with the Klondike. Eager fortune hunters paid the Yukon Mining School for lessons in driving dog teams, panning for gold, and using sluiceboxes.

would be trained to haul sleds full of supplies over the Klondike snow.

The stampeders often paused to watch street salesmen show off the newest products designed for those traveling north. There were Klondike medicine chests, Klondike blankets, and Klondike electric gold pans. There were portable Klondike houses, which the peddlers told their customers were "as light as air," even with the double bed and special Yukon stove that folded up inside. Dried food was sold in large quantities to future miners who wanted to save weight and space in their backpacks. Although most of the food was colorless and tasted bad, the miners bought everything from dried onions and turnips to evaporated rhubarb and potatoes.

Many dishonest merchants made money during the gold rush by selling worthless products or taking advantage of the innocent goldseekers. One Klondiker, Arthur Dietz, stopped on the street to watch a salesman pour some yellow powder from a sack and make a plate of scrambled eggs. Dietz was so impressed that he bought 100 pounds of the evaporated eggs for him and his traveling companions. It was not until the group was well on its way to the Klondike that Dietz opened the sacks. He realized that the yellow powder inside was really not eggs at all. The



This map shows the two most popular routes to the Klondike—the Inside Passage, which led goldseekers through Dyea or Skagway, and the All-Water Route through St. Michael and up the Yukon River to Dawson. While Seattle was the world's busiest Klondike port, stampededers also set out for Dawson from other major harbors along the West Coast.

deceitful salesman had switched sacks and sold him 100 pounds of corn meal.

Like Arthur Dietz, thousands of goldseekers would face many unexpected difficulties on the Klondike trail. Most of the fortune hunters rushed to buy their tickets without truly knowing where their journey would lead them or what obstacles lay ahead. They read guidebooks about the Klondike, but even these were often inaccurate and misleading. Several books told readers that the Klondike was located in Alaska, when actually the region lay just across the Canadian border. Other travel guides incorrectly led readers to believe that the trails to the Klondike were like winding country lanes.

Many people also had unrealistic ideas of what their lives would be like once they reached the Klondike. One man set out for the Yukon as if he were taking a pleasant northern vacation. His outfit included thirty-two pairs of moccasins, one case of pipes, two Irish setters, a puppy, and a badminton set. Another man, who worked as a dance instructor, had hopes that he could give dancing lessons to the miners and Indians of the North, while digging nuggets during his spare time in the summer. A woman from Ireland planned to move her entire family to the Yukon, where she imagined her sons and daughters would attend school in the daytime and dig gold in the early mornings and late evenings. None of these Klondikers expected the harsh Arctic climate or understood that, to make any money, gold digging had to be a full-time job.

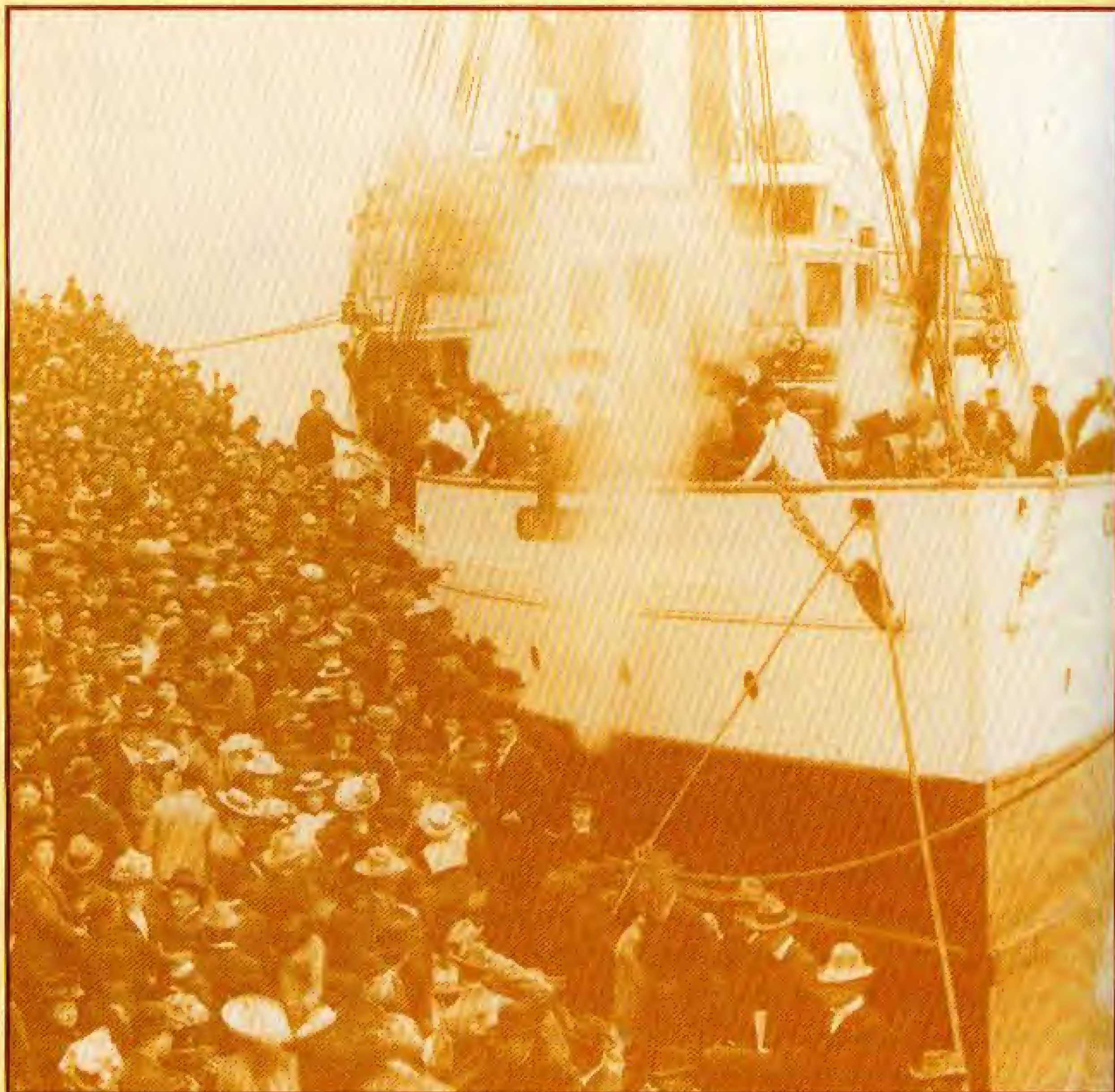
No one had more impractical ideas of how to become wealthy in the Klondike than the



businessmen, scientists, and inventors of the day. The newspapers were full of advertisements for strange new inventions that were “guaranteed” to make gold mining easier and pockets fuller. A business called the Trans-Alaskan Gopher Company promised to train gophers to claw through the icy gravel and uncover nuggets of gold.

Another scheme was the “Klondike Bicycle.” Its inventor, Jacob Coxey, told reporters that his special bike could carry 500 pounds of supplies all the way to the Yukon. With its unfolding side-wheels, handlebar attachments, and rawhide-bound frame, the unsuccessful Klondike Bicycle was a comical looking vehicle. Certainly, if Jacob Coxey had ever seen the Yukon’s steep mountains

In the early days of the gold rush, many newcomers arrived in Dawson expecting to find a wealthy town with tidy shops and clean streets. Instead, they found confusion and rivers of mud.



As steam from the ship's boilers fills the air, passengers look down on hundreds of friends, relatives, and spectators who jam the docks, waiting to see the Humboldt leave for the Klondike.

and dense forests, he never would have invented such an odd contraption.

As the summer of 1897 passed, a new ship left for the Klondike almost every day. The gold-seekers boarded the most unusual assortment of boats ever assembled. Coal ships, yachts, schooners, barges, and old fishing boats—any vessel that could float became a gold ship. Many boats that had long ago been declared unsafe

were quickly brought in from the shipyards. Even with the hasty repairs that were made, many Klondike boats were referred to as "floating coffins."

Despite warnings, the excited stampeders did not seem to care whether their boats were seaworthy or not. The gold-crazed people pushed up the ramps, filling every available space on board. Passengers stood elbow-to-elbow. Over the ships' railings, several tearful faces appeared. Many goldseekers would not see their families again for months and months. But as the crowd below cried, "Three cheers for the Klondike!" and the ship whistles blasted a farewell, most of the passengers forgot their sadness.

Their Klondike adventure had finally begun.

As stampeders confidently set out on untraveled routes to the Klondike, a transformation took place in the North. On their way to Dawson, many stampeders discovered fertile ground for farming. Others stumbled upon creeks showing traces of gold. Men and women cut their journeys short and stayed to develop the land. As if a hidden door had been flung open, the mystery surrounding Alaska and northwest Canada disappeared. Suddenly, the North was a frontier for opportunity.

Few mining fortunes were made in the Klondike. In the early days comforts were rare and hardships were common. Yet, most of those who took part in this strange mass movement northward continued to share one special thought until they died: they would not have missed the Klondike adventure for anything in the world.

Thousands of men and women returned to their normal lives after the Klondike gold rush, but their outlook on the world had changed profoundly. The stampede taught those who reached Dawson that they could survive hardships and make a home in a desolate land—achievements that had seemed impossible only a few months before.

